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United Kingdom

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

"Minister for fitness" to target obesity in England

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Approved by:

Besa L. Kotati
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Steve R. Knight

Report Highlights:

The UK Government has launched a renewed attempt to tackle obesity in England by appointing a 'minister for fitness'. Obesity levels, and the health costs associated with tackling related diseases, are rising rapidly. UK Minister for Public Health, Caroline Flint, has been tasked with working across government to develop a strategy building on and developing existing work to improve the population's health.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Unscheduled Report
London [UK1]
[UK]

The UK Government has launched a renewed effort to tackle obesity in England by appointing a 'minister for fitness'. Minister for Public Health, Caroline Flint, has been tasked with working across government to develop a strategy building on and developing existing work to transform the population into a fitter and more active nation in the run up to the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Existing initiatives include the "Small change, big difference" campaign which encourages people to make minor changes to their lifestyles to achieve long term health benefits. Working with public, private and third party organizations the government aims to make active recreation available to all, especially to people that currently undertake no form of physical activity.

According to the Department of Health, figures due out this week are set to show that, if nothing changes, there will be a significant increase in adult obesity levels in England by 2010. As an example, obesity prevalence in men is currently forecast to rise from 22 per cent in 2003 to 33 per cent in 2010. In addition to the implications for the health of the nation, the cost of dealing with obesity and the diseases it causes, which already runs into billions of pounds each year, are clearly also of concern to the government.

Speaking to BBC's Radio 4 Ms. Flint said, "I have been given the role of looking across government departments as to how we can better look at the policies we have and how we spend our money to enable people to improve their health.

"What is important is that people do recognize that there are some pretty small changes that they can make in their lifestyle in terms of physical activity that can start making a big difference to their health.

"And I think that that is important, because a lot of people think that they have to go to the gym five times a week and if they can't do that, they can't do anything - and that is just not true."

The Department of Health's dedicated "Choosing Health" section of its website can be found at:

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/OrganisationPolicy/Modernisation/ChoosingHealth/fs/en

More information on "Small change, big difference" is available at:

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/OrganisationPolicy/Modernisation/ChoosingHealth/SmallChangeBigDifference/fs/en